



# CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT BRINGS HOPE TO TEXAS FAMILIES

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

IN THE STATE OF TEXAS, THE OFFICE of the Attorney General (OAG) is charged with running the state's child support collection agency. As Attorney General, I am responsible for collecting child support for more than one million Texas families. Fortunately, the vast majority of Texas parents provide their children the financial resources and support they need to grow healthy and strong. Because some cases require additional work, however, we have a team of professionals who work to ensure parents fulfill their court-ordered child support obligations.

Thanks to the thousands of Texas parents who complied with their child support orders – and a lot of hard work by the dedicated folks in our child support division, we collected a record-breaking \$3 billion during the last fiscal year. For the past five years, Texas has ranked first in the nation for total child support collections – despite the fact that we did not have the nation's highest caseload. The Texas child support program was also among the highest-ranking in the nation for efficiency and effectiveness.

Collecting child support is about more than providing young Texans the food, clothing and support they need today. It's about laying the foundation for them to become successful adults. Research shows that children who

receive support from their parents have fewer behavioral problems, make better grades and stay in school longer than children whose parents are uninvolved in their lives and fail to support them. In addition, studies show that children with two involved and caring parents are more self-confident, more likely to exercise self-control and less likely to engage in risky behaviors as teenagers.

Unfortunately, some young Texans never benefit from steady child support payments. Many of their mothers and fathers have the ability to pay, but refuse to fulfill their legal obligations to support their children. After a parent repeatedly refuses to pay child support, law enforcement may have to get involved. When that happens, our office works closely with local authorities to ensure parents comply with the law.

## **Child Support Roundups**

When other enforcement efforts fail, the OAG can ask a court to impose jail time for delinquent parents who violate court orders to pay child support. In 2011, the OAG Child Support Division partnered with eight local law enforcement agencies to launch countywide sweeps that locate and arrest parents who were wanted by authorities for failing to pay court-ordered child support. Because of these initiatives, local law enforcement

officers arrested 150 parents who violated court orders requiring them to pay child support.

## **Most Wanted Child Support Evaders**

When delinquent parents owe more than \$5,000 and are subject to an arrest warrant, they may be placed on the State's "Most Wanted Child Support Evader" list. Delinquent parents who are included on the annual Evader list have the ability to make their court-ordered child support payments but simply refuse to do so. Unfortunately, incarceration is the only option for parents who willfully and repeatedly violate the law.

Consider the case of Dr. David Z. Martin, 55, who was apprehended at John F. Kennedy International Airport after a Texas court issued a felony arrest warrant because he failed to pay thousands of dollars in child support. Police officers with the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, which operates JFK Airport, arrested Dr. Martin as he exited a flight from Oman. The warrant stemmed from criminal nonsupport charges that were filed in 1998 by authorities in Carson County, Texas.

## **Criminal Nonsupport**

As Dr. Martin's case demonstrates, failure to pay child support is not just a civil violation. Under Texas law, parents who intentionally or knowingly fail to comply with a court's child support

orders commit a state jail felony. Prosecuting violators for criminal nonsupport holds them accountable for breaking the law and discourages parents from refusing to make court-ordered child support payments.

In light of the national economic downturn, some delinquent parents may have lost their jobs or suffered salary reductions. In these cases, parents can ask the courts to modify their support obligations. This process helps ensure that parents who are unable to fulfill their child support obligations do not face prosecution because of their changed economic circumstances.

Like most law enforcement efforts, collaboration among state, local and federal authorities is critical to achieving success. Thanks to effective working relationships with local sheriffs, constables, police departments and district and county attorneys, the OAG operates the nation's top child support program. Our successes benefit not only Texas children, but also the taxpayers – because collecting child support helps ensure that children are supported by their parents, not by taxpayer-funded programs. By continuing to work to collect child support for Texas children, we have an opportunity to ensure they have a brighter future and the opportunity for success.

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